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The Portland of the Pacific Beguiles

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The Portland of the Pacific beguiles

When Amos Lovejoy of Boston and Francis Pettygrove of Portland sought to name the clearing in the Oregon forest called "Stumptown" (because of the tree stumps remaining from the frequent fires set by the Indians), each wanted to honor the New England city from which he came. By the toss of a coin, Pettygrove was the winner, and the Portland of the Northeast had its counterpart in the Portland of the Northwest.

From this inauspicious beginning in 1845, the "City of Roses" — so named because Portland sponsors the second-largest rose parade and festival in the country — has become the third-largest port on the West Coast, second city of the Pacific Northwest, and first city of Oregon, claiming one out of six residents in this state of three million inhabitants.

Coming from the crowded Northeast, one is impressed with the availability of space in Oregon, including its cities. Oregon is 50 percent larger in area than the New England states combined, and its population is less than one-fourth the 13 million in these six states.

Portland, like most other cities in this nation — except New England — is able to annex territory as the city grows in population. So the city, which has grown to 130 square miles in area, averages just over 3,600 persons per square mile. Contrast this with Providence and its 19 square miles, which averages over 8,400 persons for each square mile.

This ample space is reflected in the wide sidewalks and streets and the ubiquitous parks scattered throughout the city. Forest Park — with 4,700 acres, the largest urban park in the country — is more than 10 times the size of Roger Williams Park, and it makes up one-half of the total acreage of the city's 160 parks.

Portland has made a name for itself with its integrated and efficient public transit system. Transit lanes, frequent service, light rail, trolleys and buses working together contribute to a transit system that is among the best in the country and, within the 300-block downtown, all of it is free. This works partly because parking is limited, purposely, to make the public transit option more viable.

The city blocks measure 200 feet on a side, about one-half the size of a normal city block, so that walking is encouraged, and buses carry bicycles so that cyclists use the buses. Sculptures abound, plantings of roses and other flowers are everywhere, and parks are numerous. There are two eight-block pedestrian walks, and activities are conducted and coordinated by a downtown management operation, so there are more people downtown on a Saturday than during the week.

Thirty downtown art galleries open one night a month, and people get free public transit to all of them during that time. The country's largest open-air crafts market is busy on Saturday, and more light rail lines are being built.

The climate has lower humidity, cooler summers, and milder winters than Providence. The public telephones have telephone books, the people are genuinely friendly and helpful and, yes, the drivers abide by the laws and are courteous.

The city of Portland is so orderly that even Saks Fifth Avenue is actually located on Fifth Avenue.

And therein may lie the problem. A former

New Yorker and San Franciscan said she could hardly wait to leave because it was so boring. Crime is no longer a stranger to the old town historic district, and gangs have caused disruptions in the past. Portland is not Nirvana but, in the minds of many natives, it approaches that state.

I close with two endorsements. My son, who lives in Portland, told me not to write about the city because this would only serve to attract more residents—and it's bad enough already

with all the Californians coming in. House prices today, at \$117,000, now exceed those of the Providence area by \$2000.

Finally, my wife said, "If we were younger, I'd like to move to Portland."

And that is as strong an endorsement as you can get.

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